

The great Challenge Series Anniversary Report Vol. 2

Visiting Bernd Hahne – a Conversation with the first Challenge Champion

by Matthias Urban

Bernd Hahne is a special person to me. Not only is he a true gentleman and fantastic racer, but, he is the one, who sold me my first Ferrari – a procedure I will never forget. I was looking for a “cheap” Mondial or a 328 that time and after failing to “re-import” a German delivered 328 in Blu Chiaro from Foitek’s in Urdorf, Switzerland, because a member of the German Ferrari Club was quicker to decide than me, I focussed on a Mondial at Lueg’s in Meerbusch close to Düsseldorf who are the successors to AutoBecker, one of the “dealer dinosaurs”, who went bankrupt in 2002, being the official German importer appointed by Ferrari in 1957. I still remember as if it was today when I entered the showroom and passed the Mondial because a wonderful F355 GTS in Giallo Modena caught my eye. It was a love at first sight and we are still together today, la Regina Giallo and me – but that’s another story.

Ever since, contact to Bernd Hahne was occasionally vital. I sure visited the Showroom quite often and a very deep and reliable relationship to the whole team at Lueg’s grew over the time. Even when Bernd Hahne retired in 2007 we met either at Lueg’s by chance or at Oldtimer Grandprix, Modena Motorsports Track Days or at the Ferrari Racing Days.

Bernd Hahne was born on June, 3rd 1944 in Moers in North Rhine Westphalia, being one of seven children. His father worked as a wholesaler for tobacco. Bernd’s brother Hubert was a successful racer as well as their nephew Jörg van Ommen. Hubert Hahne became a BMW dealer and exclusive importer for Lamborghini.

Bernd Hahne started racing when he was 189, driving a Honda 360. He raced the 1989/90 seasons of the Shell Historic Touring Cars Championship achieving only top positions. He was connected with Fritz Neuser’s Scuderia Auto Neuser who ran an Alfa GTA in the European Touring Cars Championship. Hahne achieved a second place in the 1992 season.

One has to know that Neuser also had been one of Ferrari’s official dealers in Germany and when Ferrari announced the start of their brand trophy series called “Ferrari Challenge” it was a kind of marketing for Ferrari-dealers to participate. Hahne was asked by Neuser to join a shoot-out at Hockenheimring for the car he would enter. The competitors have been Bernd Hahne, his team mate Jürgen Zerha and the German Ferrari legend, Dr. Helmut Mander. Bernd Hahne recalls that he

was not too optimistic as he never had driven a modern Ferrari until then and he was concerned that he would damage such a fast car as he never had raced modern cars like these until then. He was very surprised that he achieved one fast lap after the other and outpaced his rivals easily. Neuser awarded Bernd Hahne the cockpit of 348 Challenge s/n 89395 and what a good decision that was.



When talking with Bernd Hahne he remembered that he was quite nervous before the race. It would become his first race on slicks and he asked his brother, Armin, for advice, as he was test driver with Pirelli at that time. "We knew", he says, "that the tires would be good for a few laps only and it was a major advantage to start from one of the first positions in the grid". Bernd Hahne achieved seven victories out of 10 starts. Only the second heat in Zeltweg – a dnf because of a puncture- did not return a top ten result. However Bernd Hahne and Austrian Karl Baron rivalled for the title until the last race. Hahne finally made it 146:135 points and became first ever Ferrari Challenge Champion! The series –still being young- was a combined European and International Challenge then.

What would you expect as reaction of a Champion? Something like "I knew it", "I am the Greatest" or anything else of that kind. Not with Bernd Hahne. Asked about the secret of success, Bernd Hahne says, that it was an advantage of knowledge that resulted from his experience from historic racing combined with the knowledge of his brother about tires. He rewards the experience from historic racing to his mechanic Tano, who always experimented with tire pressures and cambers, just like the F1-crews do it today and something, his rivals did not. The combined knowledge of tire pressure, treating the Pirelli P Zeros and technical challenges provided by the different tracks have been it as far as Bernd Hahne recalls.



1994 was a different and difficult year for the defending champion and resulted in being the runner-up to new champion, Harald Brutschin who started for Stuttgart based dealer, Lais Power. Brutschin only achieved one victory compared to five wins for Bernd Hahne, but Brutschin took points in eight of the ten races. In the end, Brutschin had an advantage of five points compared to Hahne. Bernd Hahne is still very contrite about the Spa-race of that season when he was disqualified. His mechanic, who –as was told above- provided a support that made Hahne win many races had the sport exhaust installed instead

of the regular exhaust. Usually not a big thing, one only has to add additional weight to the car, if Bernd Hahne recalls it correct, it had to be 5 kgs. The mechanic forgot to add the weight and disqualification was the logical step. Race reports of the season quote that this did not happen in Spa, but in Hockenheim, however, Hahne was disqualified for both races with four heats. The reason for the disqualification in Spa should have been due to ignoring yellow flags.

Harald Brutschin became the Champion of the Ferrari Challenge (Mid Europe) for 1994 and 1995. Bernd Hahne had skipped the 1995 season and showed up at the season end- celebration in

Wiesbaden in October of 1995. It was already rumoured then, that he possibly would return for the 1996 season, driving a F355 Challenge.

Imagine sitting together with a man of 68 and looking into eyes of a young boy who has just received an unexpected present. This exactly is the scene when Bernd Hahne talks about his “second” Challenge career. AutoBecker was the synonym for Ferrari in Germany at that time. Being the exclusive importer since 1957 AutoBecker wanted to improve its Challenge results and asked Bernd Hahne to take one of the cockpits of their three cars for the 1996 season. The offer included the commitment to work as a representative for AutoBecker’s Ferrari-sales. Bernd Hahne says, what more could I have asked for? The gentleman was finally where he belonged. For eleven years, Bernd Hahne worked with Ferrari Düsseldorf, first with AutoBecker and then with Lueg Sportivo who took over after AutoBecker’s bankruptcy.

After a furious start into the season, achieving four top positions in the first eight heats, Bernd Hahne did not win a further race but managed to gain enough points to win his second title leading his team mate Bruno Staub with three points after the final race in Mugello.

Once again, Bernd Hahne retired from the Ferrari Challenge but stayed with AutoBecker’s team as advisor. Hahne concentrated on Historic Racing and was quite often seen in the Ferrari Maserati Historic Challenge as well as participating in other historic racing series.

Today, Bernd Hahne lives in Meerbusch near Düsseldorf and is running his own business on one hand on the other hand he nowadays is representative with McLaren Düsseldorf.



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